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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000215

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE
USAID/AFR/SA FOR E. LOKEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)
SUBJECT: FORMER STUDENT LEADER EMERGES AS PRO-SENATE
FACTION LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE

REF: A. HARARE 95

[1](#)B. 2004 PRETORIA 1865 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reasons 1.5 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) On February 19, former student leader Arthur Mutambara, who now resides in South Africa, announced his decision to run for president of the pro-senate faction of the MDC. A number of pro-senate MDC MPs expressed strong support for Mutambara and said he would breathe new life into the party, especially since he was not involved in the MDC split. One pro-senate MP speculated that he could reunify the party because of the level of support for him from both factions. The pro-boycott faction of the MDC has been silent on Mutambara. End summary.

Mutambara Vies for Pro-senate Leadership

[1](#)2. (U) On February 19, former University of Zimbabwe student leader Arthur Mutambara arrived in Zimbabwe to announce his intention to run for president of the pro-senate faction of the MDC. Mutambara would compete for the presidency against deputy secretary general Gift Chimaniikire at the pro-senate faction's congress scheduled for February 25-26 in Bulawayo. Mutambara, a Rhodes scholar who holds a PhD in Robotics from Oxford University, has been living in South Africa where he is the managing director of Africa Technology and Business Institute. Mutambara is best known in Zimbabwe for leading student protests against government corruption in the late 1980s as president of the University of Zimbabwe's Student Representative Council. He was reportedly involved in discussions in 2004 about a breakaway party associated with Ncube that never came to fruition (ref B). In a February 20 press statement explaining his decision, Mutambara said that it was the duty of Zimbabwean citizens to develop solutions to the country's problems. He said that to achieve reunification the MDC required an "infusion of new leadership, untainted by current disagreements."

Strong Support for Mutambara

[1](#)3. (C) MDC pro-senate faction MP and parliamentary spokesperson Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga told poloff on February 22 that Mutambara had a lot of support at all levels of the party, from ordinary citizens, and from civil society, and would likely win the presidency of the faction. (NB: Embassy local staff report that among people living in high density areas of Harare the news was overshadowed by reports that the GOZ had released to the pro-senate faction MDC's share of funds provided to political parties.) According to Mushonga, Gift Chimaniikire, who had been planning to run for the presidency, was rethinking his position. Although at one time he was the only likely candidate, Chimaniikire did not have enough grass roots support and would likely back down from running against Mutambara on the advice of other pro-senate faction leaders. Mushonga was confident Chimaniikire would come around and ultimately support Mutambara.

[1](#)4. (C) Mushonga said that since the announcement the pro-senate faction had been inundated with calls from individuals who had not been planning to attend the faction's congress and were now enthusiastic to do so. Countering statements made in the Government-sponsored Herald newspaper criticizing Mutambara for having been out of the country for more than a decade, she said that his experience dealing with other parts of Africa would be an asset to the MDC, as he could apply lessons learned from those experiences to the situation in Zimbabwe. Mutambara represented a fresh

infusion into a party full of leaders who had been around since 1999 and who needed a new perspective. Her main concern was that there would be high expectations for him to achieve much in the immediate future when he would need to be settle in and get to know the party. In an e-mail praising Mutambara on February 20, previously faction-neutral MP David Coltart emphasized that Mutambara was untainted by the split and said that Mutambara was as "one of Zimbabwe's brightest sons."

Effect on MDC Split

15. (C) Mushonga said that Mutambara's election would attract leaders from the pro-boycott faction to his side. Mushonga said that ordinary citizens who had been disappointed and discouraged by the split in the MDC were now energized. In an e-mail on February 20, pro-senate faction MP Trudy Stevenson said that Zimbabweans had found this renewed energy because a prominent countryman was returning home. She said his return would persuade others in the diaspora to return. For its part, the Tsvangirai-led pro-boycott faction has been surprisingly silent on Mutambara's reentry into Zimbabwean politics.

Bio Note

16. (U) Mutambara is currently Managing Director of Africa Technology and Business Institute, a professional advisory services firm operating in 13 African countries; a Principal Consultant with MAC Consulting; and Professor of Operations Management with the School of Business Leadership at the University of South Africa. Prior to that he held positions as Director of Payments at Standard Bank in South Africa (2002-2003) and Management Consultant at McKinsey and Company in Chicago. Mutambara was a visiting research fellow or scientist at MIT (1999-2000), Carnegie Mellon's Robotics Institute (1998), NASA (1996-1997), and Florida State University (1995-1997). Mutambara was awarded both Rhodes and Fulbright scholarships (1991). He holds a PhD in Robotics and Megatronics from Oxford University (1995), a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering and Computer Engineering from Oxford (1992), and a Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Electronic Engineering from the University of Zimbabwe (1990).

Comment

17. (C) In a likely contest with Chimanimikire for president of the MDC's pro-senate faction, Mutambara is the odds on favorite. The transplanted intellectual appears to be Welshman Ncube's anointed candidate as an alternative to the uninspiring and not well-regarded Chimanimikire, after Tendai Biti turned down overtures from the pro-senate faction (ref A). Apparently confident of Ncube's ability to deliver a victory, we understand that Mutambara has returned to his home in South Africa. Mutambara might indeed possess the charisma to bring more popular support and breathe new life into the squabbling pro-senate faction, at least in the short term. His appeal, however, lies principally with Zimbabwe's dwindling middle class, and his ability to connect with the more numerous low-income masses is untested at this point. Also, as an exile returning home from years abroad, he may have difficulty proving his commitment to some constituencies--although his resume credentials as a former student leader hold out some room for optimism. His chemistry with Ncube, who remains the key intellectual force in the pro-senate faction, is another key, unknown variable that will likely be a decisive factor in determining his effectiveness. Today's state-controlled Herald featured a cartoon of Morgan Tsvangirai in a Union Jack hat being symbolically booted out

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in favor of a Stars-and-Stripes-clad Mutambara, an interesting analysis suggestive of a possible ZANU-PF line of attack against him. End comment.
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